



Dear friends,

Greetings from a sunny Blantyre! The semester at the Evangelical Bible College of Malawi has come to an end, and so have the Curriculum Review meetings, so I have a breathing space which is great!



Nursery graduates!

A living hope

During the last semester, I felt privileged to be teaching the third-year classes - those about to graduate. There are plenty of ups and downs in teaching, and this was true right up until the last week, when the Monday was suddenly declared a public holiday (due to the end of Ramadan). I wondered how we would manage to adjust, but the students were great, and we managed to reschedule the lessons for the next day. I was impressed to see their commitment to the end! The last lessons were important for me - a kind of closure, and a time to share lessons learned and then pray for each other. I have rejoiced to see at least some of the students reflecting on our lessons in relation to their own lives and ministry, and they were each able to share a favourite verse from our studies in the Doctrine of the Last Things. The lessons have been a good reminder to me to see things in God's perspective - so often it is easy to be burdened by the struggles and challenges we face. Yet Romans 5:1-2 says:

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

The New Living Translation puts the last sentence this way: *"we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory"*. What a wonderful thing to be able to say! I pray that the new graduates - and myself! - will live out this sure and certain hope.

Hopes fulfilled

At last the countdown was over, and graduation day dawned! As usual, the students were excited as they welcomed friends and family, and in one case, a truck full of people from their home church. The church was packed for the service.



Sadly, one of the students, Winess Laiteni, was not able to make it. Instead, he was in hospital getting his broken leg seen to. When we welcomed him back to EBCoM later that day, he was obviously still in a great deal of pain. It was good to see his smile come back the next week, when we arranged a special certificate presentation and photo session. Thankfully he has been enabled to stay on at College while his leg heals - the journey home, which would involve travelling on the back of a lorry down a long dirt road in Mozambique, would be very uncomfortable.



Winess Laiteni with Rev. Simon Chikwana

Working together

The week leading up to graduation was somewhat fraught, as a number of things that should have been in place were not. One of the reasons was that with four new members of Faculty staff over the year, there have also been many changes in staff roles. We normally have a meeting to discuss each student, which starts in the morning and may stretch into the afternoon. This year, it lasted, on and off, for three days! However, I felt that something good came out of it, because as a staff we pulled together and built up more of a sense of team.



EBCoM Faculty July 2017

This continued in the Curriculum Review meetings held last week. It was encouraging to see honest discussion and a willingness to share opinions. Such openness has often been lacking before.

SIM family

Although I am often tempted to feel lonely, especially when I come back to my empty cottage at the end of a long day at EBCoM, I am very thankful for the family I am part of here. I especially enjoy being 'Auntie' to the Richter family next door. But one of the challenges of being part of a mission family is the constant coming and going. I will miss the Wheatley family, who have just left on home assignment. They are good friends who have often helped me unwind after stressful times at EBCoM. (Their dog is still here, and accompanied me on some good walks each day last week after the Curriculum Review meetings!)

Just over a week ago I joined another family, the Bontenbals, to go with them to the engagement ceremony of an EBCoM graduate. Here an official engagement is a time for the

two families - or two communities - to meet each other and to be linked through the couple. Each side gives to the other a live chicken as a symbol of that link. Later in the ceremony, one cooked chicken is shared by those on each side who will have a role in helping the couple when they face difficulties in their marriage. A prominent part of the ceremony these days is fund raising. At every turn, the leader of the ceremony invited different groups of people to come (dancing!) up to give. People come specially prepared with lots of small denomination notes, which are liberally thrown towards the couple. It's not something I could imagine happening in the UK!

Looking ahead

SIM Malawi's annual Spiritual Life Conference is from 24th - 29th July. This year we will be on the shore of Lake Malawi, at Blue Waters Resort, Salima. I am thankful for the opportunity given to stop and be refreshed.

At the beginning of August, I will be working with the Academic Dean and a small committee working through some of the matters arising from the Curriculum Review. On August 12th EBCoM will be holding another set of admissions interviews for the coming academic year. We do need quite a few more applicants to give us a good intake.

Prayer points

Please join me in giving praise for:

- the end of the academic year and successful graduates.
- God's enabling throughout the long semester.
- a growth in unity as staff have worked together in recent meetings.

Please pray for:

- new graduates as they move to begin their ministry.
- SIM's Spiritual Life Conference to be a time of refreshment for all.
- the new intake for next year.

Thank you for praying and partnering with me in what God has called me to do here in Malawi. Ambuye akudalitseni (The Lord bless you),

Ruth

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